

This thesis has identified and tested a methodology for the sustainable management of walking routes. In testing and comparing the methodology on two walking routes in Ireland, a range of results have been gathered. Findings suggest that the approach is appropriate and effective in managing walking routes in the context of the study and in including community participation in the management process. Two study sites with different landscapes and infrastructures and varying levels of attractiveness for walking were used during research, and they were found to be quite different in their route management procedures.

The methodology employed landscape character assessments, CORINE land cover data and checklist surveys to investigate the landscape and physical conditions of the routes studied. Counts were conducted of route users, and user questionnaire surveys were conducted. Interviews with local stakeholders and focus group sessions using the GIS were conducted to assess local opinions and draw on local knowledge of the area and the walking route.

The participative techniques tested for the research are put forward as a means of improving route management at the local level, for improving communication between local and central management bodies and for exchanging information among all interested parties. The research recognised that community involvement is essential if walking routes are to be sustainable, and the relative lack of success and popularity of routes is believed to be influenced by a lack of participation and interest at a local level, by the image of the area, as promoted in advertising and the media and by the landscapes that the routes pass through.

Where possible, all data was stored and analysed in GIS. Main data sources were the Ordnance Survey Ireland discovery series maps, landscape character assessments, CORINE land cover layers, inventories of facilities, environmental and planning designations from the local authorities and from the heritage service and data acquired from focus group sessions, questionnaires and interviews.